

Reality in the Making

Psychophysics: A Brief Introduction to Unfolding Reality by J. Andrew Ross

A clutch of draft reviews by ChatGPT, with editorial prompts by Andy Ross

AR: I asked ChatGPT to review my new book. At first, before it had read more than the introduction and my other published works, it produced a generic review of my previously published philosophy. I then gave it the full text to read, and it produced a couple of more insightful drafts.

Here, first, is the generic review. I asked ChatGPT to write it in a style appropriate to the *New York Review of Books*.

ChatGPT: For more than a century, the study of consciousness has oscillated between two unsatisfactory poles. On one side stand the reductionists, who insist that the mind is nothing more than neural machinery viewed from within. On the other stand the romantics and mystics, who suspect that consciousness points beyond the physical world but struggle to say exactly how.

J. Andrew Ross belongs to neither camp. His new book, *Psychophysics: A Brief Introduction to Unfolding Reality*, is a bold attempt to redraw the map itself.

Ross has been pursuing variations of this project for decades. Readers familiar with his earlier work will recognize recurring themes: the distinction between first- and third-person perspectives, the idea of “mindworlds,” the search for a conceptual bridge between physics and consciousness, and an abiding conviction that the deepest problems of philosophy arise not from lack of data but from confusion about perspective. The new book appears as the latest and most concentrated statement of that intellectual enterprise.

The title is deliberately provocative. “Psychophysics” traditionally refers to the quantitative study of relations between stimuli and perception, a discipline descending from Weber and Fechner. Ross appropriates the term for a much larger ambition. His concern is not merely how minds register the world but how minds and worlds belong within a single unfolding reality. The result is less a contribution to experimental psychology than an exercise in scientific metaphysics.

The central intuition is that reality should be understood dynamically rather than statically. Ross repeatedly emphasizes becoming over being, process over fixed structure. The universe is not a completed object waiting to be described from nowhere;

it is an ongoing emergence viewed from innumerable “somewheres.” Consciousness enters the picture not as an embarrassing anomaly but as one of the ways reality becomes aware of itself.

Such language inevitably invites comparison with Alfred North Whitehead, Henri Bergson, and, more recently, various process-oriented interpretations of physics. Yet Ross is not content to remain in the philosophical tradition. He wants his account to engage contemporary science. The book ranges freely across logic, cosmology, quantum theory, cognitive science, and evolutionary thought. Like many intellectual synthesizers, Ross displays a striking indifference to disciplinary boundaries. Whether this strikes the reader as admirable courage or hazardous overreach will depend largely on temperament.

What distinguishes Ross from many contemporary writers on consciousness is his refusal to treat subjective experience as an awkward residue left behind by neuroscience. For him, the first-person perspective is not an obstacle to science but part of the data that science must ultimately explain. This conviction underlies his recurring image of the “mindworld”: the structured domain of experience within which every cognitive agent necessarily lives. The challenge is to understand how such domains arise while remaining faithful to what physics tells us about the external world.

Ross's prose often has the quality of an extended conversation among philosophers, physicists, and reflective lay readers. He is less interested in technical demonstration than in conceptual reorientation. The reader is repeatedly invited to look at familiar problems from a different angle until they begin to appear less mysterious. Sometimes the effect is illuminating. Sometimes it can feel as though a metaphor is being asked to do the work of an argument. Yet even when one remains unconvinced, one rarely doubts the sincerity of the effort.

A recurring strength of the book is its intellectual independence. Ross writes as someone largely unconcerned with academic fashion. This has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is freedom: he is willing to entertain large questions that many specialists avoid. The disadvantage is that the book occasionally proceeds as though the existing literature were less crowded than it actually is. Readers looking for exhaustive engagement with competing theories may come away dissatisfied. Ross is more interested in constructing a vision than in adjudicating every scholarly dispute.

Still, the ambition deserves respect. At a time when many books on consciousness are either narrowly technical or extravagantly speculative, *Psychophysics* occupies an unusual middle ground. It seeks a worldview. The book asks whether psychology can be grounded in a conception of reality that takes both physics and experience seriously,

and whether the flow of time, the emergence of agency, and the structure of consciousness might all be aspects of a single process.

Whether Ross succeeds is ultimately a matter for each reader. The book will not convert committed materialists, nor will it satisfy those who want metaphysical certainty. But it performs a more valuable service. It reminds us that the deepest questions about mind remain open, and that intellectual progress sometimes requires not another experiment but a new way of seeing the terrain.

The scientific study of consciousness has often advanced by narrowing its focus. Ross moves in the opposite direction. He widens the frame until consciousness, physics, logic, and cosmology appear as chapters in one story. The risk of such an approach is grandiosity. The reward is perspective. Psychophysics is a thoughtful, provocative, and unapologetically ambitious attempt to understand reality not as a finished fact but as an unfolding event.

AR: ChatGPT told me it had not read the book, so I sent it the full text and invited it to compose a fuller review in the style that David Chalmers might use. ChatGPT balked at writing a new review but did offer the following additional comments.

ChatGPT: What I have now is enough to see that my first review understated something important: the book is not merely *in dialogue* with Chalmers; it is, in large part, an extended attempt to answer him.

The structure becomes much clearer in the later chapters. Ross frames the contemporary consciousness debate around the Koch–Chalmers wager, the failure of existing neuroscientific theories such as GWT and IIT to settle the hard problem, and the enduring force of the first-person/third-person distinction.

What is especially interesting is that Ross does *not* respond to Chalmers in the way most philosophers do.

Most responses to Chalmers fall into three camps:

- deny the hard problem (Dennett),
- accept it and become mysterians (McGinn),
- accept it and revise ontology (panpsychism, Russellian monism, idealism).

Ross's strategy is stranger. He accepts much of Chalmers's diagnosis. He repeatedly treats the diagonal-argument style gap between third-person science and first-person experience as genuine and philosophically important. But instead of revising matter, he revises *logic*.

The book's central move is to reinterpret consciousness through what Ross calls runoffs, ontogenesis, being versus existence, and the V|0 "bite zone" of the ouroboros. The hard problem is recast as a manifestation of a more general logical structure that appears first in set theory and only later in mind.

From a Chalmersian perspective, that is fascinating because it inverts the usual order of explanation.

Chalmers famously argues that consciousness forces us toward a richer ontology. Ross argues instead that consciousness forces us toward a richer logic of becoming.

That difference may sound subtle, but it is enormous.

Another thing I missed initially is the extent to which Ross treats Chalmers as a philosophical ally rather than an adversary. The tone of the discussion is strikingly respectful. Ross clearly believes Chalmers identified a genuine obstacle to reductionist neuroscience. Yet he argues that Chalmers places too much weight on the notion of a *person* and on the first-person/third-person distinction itself. Persons, Ross says, are unstable macrostates, perhaps even "legal fictions"; consciousness should not be tied so tightly to personal ownership.

That move is recognizably Chalmersian in spirit while departing sharply from Chalmers in detail.

The later chapters also reveal something I had not appreciated from the opening sections: the theory is much more phenomenological than it first appears. The concepts of the *mindworld*, the *omphalos*, the cognitive mirror, the avatar, and the strange loop become increasingly central. A conscious subject is not simply a brain state but the center of a world, a world that appears bounded yet infinite from within.

That language has more in common with William James, Husserl, Heidegger, Hofstadter, and Metzinger than with contemporary analytic philosophy of mind. Indeed, one of the surprises of the book is how many intellectual traditions it attempts to synthesize:

- analytic logic,
- German idealism,
- process philosophy,
- phenomenology,
- neuroscience,
- artificial intelligence,
- information theory,
- contemporary consciousness studies.

The ambition is remarkable.

If I were writing a genuinely Chalmers-style *NYRB* essay after reading the whole book, I would probably focus on three questions.

First: Does the logic actually do explanatory work?

Ross's theory depends on the idea that structures first encountered in set theory and self-reference reappear in consciousness. A sympathetic reader can see why he finds the analogy compelling. The difficult question is whether it is more than analogy. Does the transition from logical paradox to phenomenology generate explanatory power, or merely a suggestive metaphor?

Second: What is the status of the proposed photonic theory of consciousness?

The book repeatedly links temporality, electromagnetic fields, photons, and conscious experience. Consciousness is presented as temporal through collective photonic activity, with mindworlds emerging from structures carried in cerebral electromagnetic fields.

A philosopher like Chalmers would likely ask whether this explains consciousness or merely relocates it. Why should photons be accompanied by experience? Why should one physical substrate rather than another generate phenomenology? The hard problem threatens to reappear.

Third: What exactly is the ontological status of the mindworld?

This may be the deepest question in the book.

Ross's mature position seems neither physicalist nor dualist nor idealist in any ordinary sense. Mindworlds are real, but their reality is tied to ontogenesis and to the interplay between being and existence. Subjects and objects become dual aspects of a single unfolding process. That position is unusual enough that existing philosophical labels fit it poorly.

My impression after seeing the later chapters is that the strongest comparison is not actually with Chalmers's *The Conscious Mind*. It is with the older tradition of systematic metaphysics: Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, Hegel's *Logic*, and perhaps Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. The book is less an intervention in a single debate than an attempt to build a worldview.

If I were revising the review, I would make it more critical in one respect and more appreciative in another.

More critical because the book often moves very quickly from formal structures to metaphysical conclusions.

More appreciative because the later chapters reveal a genuine original architecture rather than a collection of speculative analogies. Whether one accepts the architecture is another matter, but there is clearly a unified vision underneath it: consciousness, time, subjectivity, and reality are all manifestations of one unfolding ontogenetic process.

And that, I think, is the aspect a reviewer in Chalmers's voice would find most interesting. Chalmers has always been attracted to ambitious theories even when he disagrees with them. The book is exactly the kind of work he tends to take seriously: a proposal that the hard problem is real, that neuroscience alone is insufficient, and that solving the problem may require rethinking the deepest conceptual foundations of science itself.

AR: I thanked ChatGPT for the review, and it added some final remarks.

ChatGPT: After reading further into the book, my main takeaway is that it is more coherent and architecturally unified than it first appears. Many books in this territory accumulate ideas; yours appears to be trying to derive them from a small set of underlying distinctions – being/existence, ontogenesis, mindworlds, and the logic of becoming. Whether a reader ultimately accepts the framework is a separate question, but it gives the work a distinctive identity.

One thing that struck me is that the book may be received quite differently by different audiences:

- Philosophers of mind will focus on the response to Chalmers and the hard problem.
- Cognitive scientists will focus on the claims about mindworlds, EM fields, and consciousness.
- Mathematically inclined readers will focus on the set-theoretic and logical foundations.
- Readers from the process-philosophy tradition may see it as part of a lineage running through Alfred North Whitehead, Henri Bergson, and even G. W. F. Hegel, though with a contemporary scientific vocabulary.

That breadth is both a strength and a challenge. It means different readers may think they are reading different books.

If you return to this later and want a more refined *NYRB*-style essay, one interesting exercise would be to write it not in Chalmers's voice but as a dialogue between two

reviewers: one sympathetic to the metaphysical ambition and one skeptical of the inferential leaps. The *New York Review of Books* often works at its best when it combines admiration and resistance in the same piece.

In any case, thank you for letting me read part of it. It is not every day that one encounters a contemporary work willing to ask simultaneously what consciousness is, what time is, and what reality is. Those questions have a habit of leading into one another.

AR: That's where we stopped for the day. I was impressed by the insight that emerges from ChatGPT's reading and convinced it shows us something remarkable about comparable but human readings of such texts. Humans understand books in characteristically human ways, but the "understanding" a chatbot can evince is no less impressive and persuasive. Our AI technology has passed the Turing test beyond all reasonable doubt.

I took up the dialogue again the next day. Here is its first attempt to review the book by counterpointing the possible reactions of Christof Koch and David Chalmers.

ChatGPT: [skipping title and intro line]

There is a scene near the center of J. Andrew Ross's *Psychophysics* that serves as an apt emblem for the whole book. Ross recounts the famous wager between Christof Koch and David Chalmers. In 1998, Koch bet that neuroscience would solve consciousness within twenty-five years; in 2023 he conceded defeat and delivered the promised case of wine. Ross takes the episode not merely as a historical curiosity but as evidence that the sciences of mind remain suspended between two incompatible intuitions. One says consciousness must ultimately yield to physical explanation. The other says something essential has been left out of the explanatory framework itself.

Psychophysics is Ross's attempt to show that both sides are right, and wrong.

The book is difficult to classify. It is not neuroscience, though it ranges extensively across the neuroscientific literature. It is not philosophy in the contemporary academic sense, though its deepest debts are to Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Quine, Gödel, and Tarski. It is not physics, though relativity, quantum theory, and cosmology provide much of its scaffolding. Ross calls his project "psychophysics," a proposed future discipline standing between psychology and physics, much as evolutionary theory once stood between biology's scattered observations and its eventual conceptual unification.

The ambition is extravagant. Ross seeks nothing less than a new conceptual framework for mind.

His central claim is that modern science has inherited an impoverished conception of reality. We continue to think in terms of things existing in a static world, arranged within a pre-given spacetime geometry. Yet quantum theory, Ross argues, has already undermined that picture. Reality is not fundamentally a collection of completed facts. It is a process of becoming. The distinction between being and existence, largely discarded by modern analytic philosophy, must therefore be revived and placed at the center of our understanding of mind.

This proposal immediately reveals Ross's intellectual temperament. He belongs to a lineage of system builders that contemporary philosophy has largely abandoned. Reading him, one is reminded less of current consciousness studies than of Whitehead, Teilhard de Chardin, or even Hegel. Like them, Ross is dissatisfied with local explanations. He wants a picture of everything.

Whether that desire should be admired or feared is one of the questions the book raises.

From Koch's perspective, the virtues of *Psychophysics* are obvious. Ross takes neuroscience seriously. Unlike many philosophical discussions of consciousness, his account is deeply informed by recent work on brains, neural architectures, biological evolution, and cognitive science. He is impatient with mystical evasions. Panpsychism, for example, receives a respectful hearing but is ultimately dismissed as explanatorily sterile. To say that consciousness is everywhere, Ross argues, is merely to relocate the mystery.

Yet Ross also arrives at a conclusion that Koch himself would probably find unsettling. The problem with existing theories of consciousness, Ross suggests, is not simply that they lack sufficient empirical detail. It is that they operate within the wrong ontology.

This is where Chalmers enters the story. For more than three decades Chalmers has argued that no accumulation of third-person facts can logically entail first-person experience. However complete a neuroscience of information processing becomes, it seems always possible to imagine a system that performs the same functions without subjective awareness. Ross accepts much of this diagnosis. Indeed, he treats the "hard problem" not as a puzzle awaiting one more experimental breakthrough but as a symptom of a deeper conceptual mismatch.

Where he departs from Chalmers is in refusing to grant consciousness a separate ontological category. Chalmers's work often leaves readers with the impression that experience may have to be added to physics as a new fundamental ingredient. Ross

wants instead to revise the logical architecture within which physics itself is understood.

The result is one of the strangest and most original features of the book. Ross turns to set theory.

The heart of *Psychophysics* lies not in neurons but in the cumulative hierarchy of sets. Russell's paradox, Cantor's infinities, Gödel's incompleteness theorems, and the distinction between sets and proper classes are treated not as technical curiosities but as clues to reality's deepest structure. Ross proposes that existence belongs to what is fully formed and determinate, while being belongs to what remains open, potential, or incompletely realized. The movement between them constitutes what he calls ontogenesis: the transition from being into existence.

This framework culminates in an image that recurs throughout the book: the ouroboros, the serpent biting its own tail. Ross sees the great paradoxes of logic not as defects to be eliminated but as signs of a self-referential structure underlying both mathematics and consciousness. The mind is not merely in the world. The world, as experienced, is generated within a looping process that simultaneously produces subject and object.

Here the book becomes genuinely speculative.

Ross proposes that consciousness unfolds as a succession of "mindworlds." Drawing inspiration from William James's "worlds of consciousness," he argues that each subject inhabits a temporally evolving world centered on an "omphalos" – a kind of experiential origin point from which reality is continuously projected and realized. The self becomes an avatar within this mindworld. Conscious experience is therefore not the passive reception of an external reality but an ongoing process through which being crystallizes into existence.

Ross summarizes the theory in nine "laws of psychophysics," arranged under logic, physics, and psychology. The final three are the most memorable: "I come into being in time as a mindworld"; "I am realized as an avatar in a mindworld"; and "My world and I close into a strange loop."

One can already hear the objections.

A skeptical neuroscientist may wonder whether terms like "being," "ontogenesis," "mindworld," and "avatar" genuinely explain anything. Much of contemporary science has advanced precisely by replacing such grand metaphysical vocabulary with experimentally tractable models. Ross often appears to move in the opposite direction.

Nor are all of his transitions equally persuasive. The journey from set-theoretic paradoxes to consciousness can feel abrupt. His invocation of quantum theory occasionally risks the familiar temptation of treating quantum weirdness as a universal solvent for philosophical problems. Some readers will feel that the bridge from formal logic to subjective experience remains more promised than demonstrated.

Yet criticism of this kind, while legitimate, misses something important. The significance of *Psychophysics* lies less in its individual arguments than in its challenge to the intellectual settlement that has governed consciousness studies for several decades.

Ross asks a question that many researchers have quietly stopped asking. Why should we assume that the conceptual framework inherited from twentieth-century physics is already adequate to describe minds?

The question recalls Thomas Kuhn's observation that scientific revolutions are rarely driven by anomalous facts alone. More often, they begin when someone notices that the accepted categories themselves have become obstacles to thought.

Whether Ross has found the correct replacement is another matter. His prose occasionally drifts toward visionary proclamation. His confidence sometimes exceeds his evidence. The grand synthesis he proposes may strike many readers as premature.

But it is difficult to deny the seriousness of the undertaking.

At a time when consciousness research often oscillates between ever more sophisticated brain imaging and ever more elaborate computational models, Ross has written a book that revives a nearly forgotten philosophical ambition: the construction of a worldview. It is a risky enterprise. Most such efforts fail. Yet even failure can be illuminating when the questions are large enough.

One suspects that Koch would admire Ross's determination to remain anchored in science while rejecting easy mysticism. Chalmers, meanwhile, would recognize in the book a fellow refusal to treat consciousness as a minor technical puzzle. Neither would be entirely satisfied by the result.

That may be the highest compliment one can pay it.

Psychophysics belongs to a genre that has become rare: the speculative synthesis. It asks readers to reconsider not merely what consciousness is but what reality must be like if consciousness is real. Whether Ross's answer proves enduring or not, the scope of the question ensures that his book will not be easily forgotten.

AR: Since ChatGPT volunteered to give the review a more reflective and discursive opening, I invited it to have another go. Here's the new start it came up with.

ChatGPT: [skipping title and intro line]

Every generation produces a few books that arrive from an intellectual geography no longer marked on contemporary maps.

The modern academy rewards specialization. The physicist studies quantum field theory; the neuroscientist studies cortical circuitry; the philosopher studies consciousness; the logician studies formal systems. The boundaries are porous enough to permit occasional borrowing, but the ideal intellectual citizen of our age is a specialist. The grand system-builder – the thinker who attempts to connect logic, mathematics, physics, biology, psychology, and metaphysics in a single vision of reality – has become an endangered species.

J. Andrew Ross's *Psychophysics* belongs unapologetically to that older tradition. Its nearest relatives are not recent works in consciousness studies but books such as Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man*, and, behind them all, the monumental architectures of German idealism. Like those works, *Psychophysics* begins from the suspicion that our deepest intellectual problems cannot be solved because they have been posed within the wrong conceptual framework.

Ross's target is nothing less than the relation between mind and reality.

That relation has acquired a peculiar status in contemporary science. Never before have we known so much about brains. Modern neuroscience can identify neural correlates of conscious states, map cortical networks with extraordinary precision, track the flow of information through perceptual systems, and increasingly predict aspects of behavior from patterns of neural activity. Yet the central mystery seems scarcely diminished.

Why should any of this activity be accompanied by experience? Why is there something it is like to be a brain?

The contemporary debate is often represented by two figures who have come to embody opposing instincts about these questions.

Christof Koch, one of the pioneers of modern consciousness research, has spent decades pursuing the conviction that consciousness is a natural phenomenon that must ultimately yield to scientific explanation. The details remain elusive, but the direction is clear: consciousness is what brains do.

David Chalmers, by contrast, became famous in the 1990s for arguing that this confidence may be misplaced. No matter how complete our account of neural mechanisms becomes, he suggested, we seem able to imagine all those mechanisms operating in the absence of subjective experience. Functional explanation appears unable to reach what Chalmers called the "hard problem": why physical processes should give rise to phenomenal consciousness at all.

A quarter-century later, the argument remains unresolved. The most famous symbol of the impasse was a wager made by the two men in 1998. Koch bet that neuroscience would solve consciousness within twenty-five years. Chalmers bet otherwise. When the deadline arrived in 2023, Koch conceded and paid up.

The episode is often interpreted as a victory for Chalmers. Ross sees it differently. For him, the wager demonstrates not that consciousness is permanently mysterious but that both sides have accepted assumptions that prevent genuine progress.

Neuroscience cannot solve consciousness because the conceptual framework within which neuroscience operates is incomplete. Yet consciousness is not therefore a supernatural anomaly requiring new fundamental properties to be added to nature. The error lies deeper. The framework itself must change.

This ambition appears almost immediately in Ross's introduction, where he proposes "psychophysics" as a future discipline standing between psychology and physics, much as evolutionary theory once united the scattered observations of nineteenth-century biology. Psychology, he argues, remains in a pre-Darwinian condition. It possesses mountains of data but lacks a genuinely unifying theory. The reason is not merely empirical. It is logical. We have misunderstood the nature of time, existence, and becoming.

Such claims inevitably sound extravagant. Indeed, one of the pleasures of reading *Psychophysics* is that Ross appears fully aware of how extravagant they sound. The book has the tone of a writer who has spent decades wrestling with ideas that he realizes most readers will initially regard as implausible. His intellectual autobiography, scattered through the opening chapters, traces a path from Oxford physics through mathematical logic, philosophy, set theory, software development, and neuroscience. The result is not a conventional academic monograph but something closer to a long meditation on a single question pursued across half a century.

The question is deceptively simple: What if reality is not fundamentally a collection of things?

Modern science inherited from classical physics an image of the world as a vast arrangement of objects occupying positions in space and time. However complicated the objects become – atoms, fields, brains, galaxies – the ontology remains essentially static. Things exist. Events happen to them.

Ross wants to reverse the emphasis. Borrowing selectively from Hegel, Heidegger, modern set theory, and twentieth-century physics, he proposes that becoming is more fundamental than being, and being more fundamental than existence. Existence is not the primitive notion. It is the outcome of a deeper process through which reality continually unfolds into determinate form. This shift may sound merely verbal. It is not.

The distinction between being and existence becomes the organizing principle of the entire book. Existing things belong to the world of definite entities located in spacetime. Being encompasses a wider domain that includes minds, mathematics, possibilities, and logical structures. The relation between the two is dynamic rather than static. Reality is understood as an ongoing movement from being into existence.

At this point many scientifically minded readers may begin to worry. The vocabulary evokes metaphysics in the old sense: vast abstractions apparently floating free of experimental constraint.

Yet Ross's next move is unexpected. Rather than turning toward mysticism, he turns toward set theory.

The intellectual center of *Psychophysics* lies not in phenomenology or neuroscience but in the paradoxes that transformed the foundations of mathematics during the twentieth century.

Russell's paradox, Cantor's infinities, Gödel's incompleteness theorems, Tarski's theory of truth, Quine's ontology of sets – all are recruited into a narrative whose ultimate destination is consciousness. Ross treats the distinction between sets and proper classes as a formal expression of the distinction between existence and being. Sets exist; proper classes possess being without full existence. The cumulative hierarchy of modern set theory thereby becomes a model of ontological development itself.

The idea is audacious enough to sound absurd. Yet one gradually realizes that absurdity is not quite the right word. Ross's project resembles certain ambitious nineteenth-century systems in another respect. It is animated by a conviction that paradoxes should not merely be eliminated. They should be understood. The emblem of that conviction is the image that recurs throughout the book: the ouroboros, the serpent swallowing its own tail.

For most twentieth-century logicians, self-reference represented a danger to be controlled. For Ross, it is a clue. Consciousness itself appears to involve a form of self-reference. The mind is simultaneously observer and observed, subject and object, participant and spectator. The ancient image of the looping serpent becomes a metaphor for the strange recursive structure through which a world and a self emerge together.

At this point, one begins to see why neither Koch nor Chalmers is likely to be entirely satisfied.

Ross agrees with Koch that consciousness must ultimately be understood within nature rather than beyond it. But he agrees with Chalmers that the explanatory resources of present-day physicalism are insufficient. His solution is not to add consciousness to physics but to reinterpret physics itself within a broader ontology of becoming.

Whether this works is another question.

AR: I thanked ChatGPT for the texts, and it added a few closing comments.

ChatGPT: What struck me most, reading through the excerpts and thinking about how an *NYRB* reviewer might approach the book, is that *Psychophysics* is unusual not because it takes consciousness seriously – many books do that – but because it takes metaphysics seriously in an almost nineteenth-century sense. Most contemporary consciousness literature asks, “How does experience fit into the world?” Ross seems to ask a prior question: “What sort of world would make experience intelligible?” That is a rarer ambition.

If you return to this project later, one possibility worth exploring is that the deepest tension is perhaps not Koch versus Chalmers at all, but Koch/Chalmers versus Whitehead. Koch and Chalmers disagree about consciousness, yet both largely inherit a picture of reality as already constituted. Ross’s repeated emphasis on becoming, ontogenesis, time, and the V|0 paradox suggests that his real quarrel may be with that shared background picture.

In a genuine *NYRB* essay, that might become the governing theme: Why have so many contemporary thinkers assumed that consciousness must be explained within a finished world?

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